

Konstantin USHINSKY

STORIES FOR CHILDREN



Konstantin Dmitrievich Ushinsky (1824-1870) was an outstanding Russian pedagogue and a writer of delightful stories for children, whose works have been included in Russian literary readers for over a century.

Ushinsky's interesting tales give children an insight into the world about them and lead them to compare, to draw conclusions and generally, to think.

Children like them and remember them.

As pedagogue and writer Ushinsky tried by means of his stories to inculcate in his readers a taste for worthwhile occupations, to develop their spirit of enquiry and lead them to the love of nature.

He considered that "education, if directed towards human happiness, should not educate for happiness but be a preparation for the work of life."



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**STORIES
FOR CHILDREN**

Drawings by *Nikolai Grishin*

Translated from the Russian by *Eve Manning*



RADUGA PUBLISHERS · MOSCOW

*Lively and interesting as
they are, Ushinsky's stories
are printed in the Soviet
Union in editions running
into millions.*

К. УШИНСКИЙ
РАССКАЗЫ И СКАЗКИ
На английском языке

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TWO GOATS

Two stubborn goats came face to face one day on a log spanning a stream. It was too narrow for them to pass—the only way was for one to move back and wait while the other one crossed.

"Move back and let me pass," said one.

"Of all the nerve—think something of yourself, don't you?" said the other. "You move back, I was first on the bridge!"

"Indeed? I'm much older than you. I don't give way to a bit of a kid! Not likely!"

Without more ado the two rammed their stubborn heads together, locked horns, braced their slender hoofs against knots in the log and started to fight. But that log was wet, and slippery. And before a minute had passed—splash! Both were in the water.



BEST TO WAIT!

Once upon a time there lived a cockerel and a pullet, brother and sister. One day when the cockerel was running about the yard he found some greenish currents and began to peck them.

"Don't eat those, Cockie," the little pullet warned him, "wait until they are ripe."

But the cockerel did not heed her; he pecked and pecked, and then—well, he could hardly drag himself home! "Oh, oh," he groaned, "I have such a dreadful tummy-ache, Sister! Oh dear, oh dear!"

The little pullet gave him a hot peppermint drink, and put a mustard plaster on the place that hurt, and it passed away.

When he was quite well again Cockie went out into the fields; he ran about, he jumped about, even flew about a little until he was quite hot. So off he went to the river to get a drink of cold water. Again his sister warned him:

"Don't drink now, Cockie, wait till you cool down."

But Cockie did not heed her, he took a good long drink of that very cold water. Very soon he was feverish, he was hot and cold and felt very bad indeed; his sister could hardly get him home. She ran for the doctor who prescribed some very nasty medicine and made Cockie stay in bed for a long while.

It was winter by the time he was really well, and the river was covered with ice. He wanted to go skating right away at once and again his sister warned him.

"Wait a bit, Cockie. Let the river get properly frozen. The ice is still thin, you can go through."

Again he did not heed her, and went skating. And what happened? The ice cracked. The ice broke. And that was the end of Cockie.







THE RAVEN AND THE MAGPIE

The motley magpie jumped about from branch to branch and chattered, chattered away without stopping, while the raven sat in silence.

"Why don't you say something, Neighbour?" the magpie asked at last. "Don't you believe what I'm telling you?"

"That's as may be, Neighbour," answered the raven. "But one thing is sure—in such a lot of talk there must be a lot of lies!"





THE BAD-TEMPERED COW

There was a cow we used to have, and she was so bad-tempered, always butting everyone—dreadful! Perhaps that was why she didn't give much milk.

Ma had an awful time with her, and my sister Fanya too. They'd drive her out with the herd, and then at midday back home she'd come, or maybe get into the grain and we'd have to go and get her out.

When she'd got a calf she was neither to hold nor to bind. Times, she'd smash up the shed with her horns, trying to get to her calf. She had long straight horns. Pa had talked many a time of sawing them down short, but he always kept putting it off—it was as if he's had a feeling.

She was always sudden and that quick, you'd never believe! When she lowered her head and raised her tail and made off, you couldn't catch her even on horseback.

One summer day she ran away from the herdsman long before evening and made her way home; she'd a calf. Ma milked her and let out the calf and called Fenya. She was about twelve at the time.

"Drive them down to the river, Fenya, let them graze on the bank, only see they don't get into the grain. There's a long time to go till evening, no sense them standing about here."

So Fenya took a twig and drove the cow and calf to the bank to graze; then she sat down and began making a wreath of the cornflowers she'd picked on her way through the rye, wove her wreath and sang as she did so.

After a while she heard a rustling in the willows, there were thickets on both sides of the river. She looked over and saw something grey pushing through the willows and she thought it was our dog Serko, silly girl. Of course a wolf is rather like a dog, only the neck is stiffer and the tail straight, it keeps its head down and the eyes blaze. But Fenya had never seen a wolf, not close.

So Fenya started calling the dog—"Serko! Serko!" and then she saw the calf rushing straight at her and the cow after it, like crazy. Fenya jumped up and pressed herself against a big willow, she didn't know what to do, and the calf came right up to her and the cow turned her rear end to them and pressed them both against the tree and put her head down and lowed—it was more like a roar—and tore at the ground with her front hoofs and held those long sharp horns ready.



Fenya was real scared. She put her arms round the tree, she wanted to scream but she had no voice. And the wolf sprang at the cow but fell back, he'd likely felt her horns. So he saw it was no good trying head on and began going first from one side and then from the other, trying to get the cow's flank or maybe get the calf, but however he tried those horns were always waiting for him.

Fenya still hadn't guessed it was a wolf; she wanted to run but the cow wouldn't let her go, kept her jammed against that tree.

Then she found her voice again and started to scream and call for help. One of our peasants was ploughing on a bit of a hill, he heard the cow bawling and the girl screaming so he dropped his plough and ran towards the sounds.

He saw what was happening but he was afraid to go for the wolf with his bare hands, it was a big one, and real savage. So he called his son who was ploughing the next field.

When the wolf saw people coming he was frightened, he tried another snap or two and then howled and slunk off into the willows.

The men almost had to carry Fenya home, so weak she was from fright. Pa was glad then that he hadn't sawn off the cow's horns!





THE HARE AND THE HEDGEHOG

The smooth white hare said to the hedgehog, "What ugly, prickly clothes you wear, brother!"

"That is true," answered the hedgehog, "but my prickly suit saves me from the teeth of dogs and wolves. Does your beautiful coat do the same?"

The hare only sighed.







THE WOODPECKER

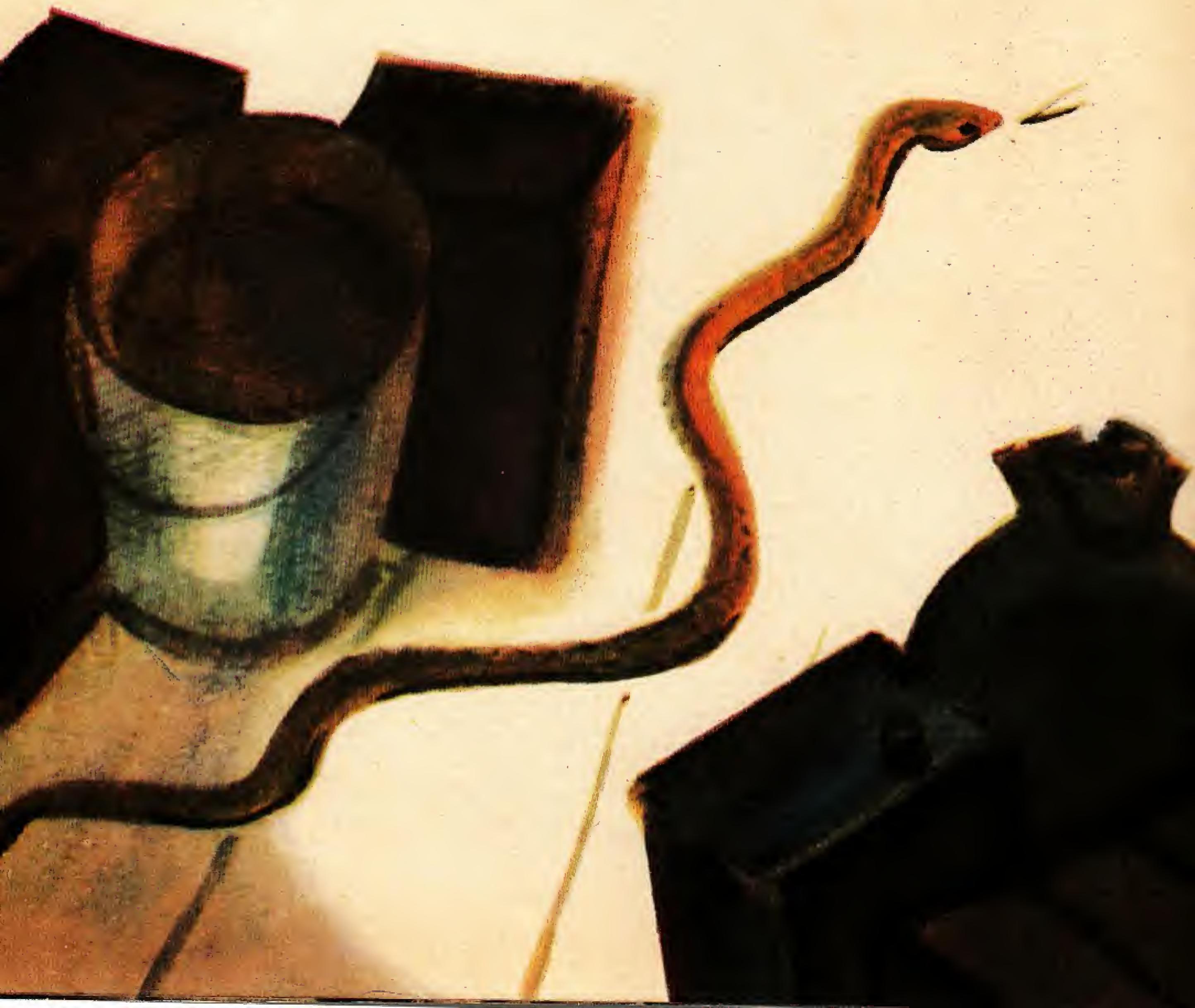
"Tap-tap-tap!" On a pine tree deep in the forest a black woodpecker is hammering. He clings with his claws, supports himself with his tail and taps with his beak to frighten ants and other insects out from under the bark. He runs round and round the tree but not one can he see. They have taken fright. "This is something bad!" They tremble in the dark, hide behind the bark. They don't want to come out. But "tap-tap-tap!" The woodpecker taps with his beak till he breaks right through the bark, pushes his long tongue into the hole and pulls out an ant like a fish on a hook.



THE ADDER

There used to be a lot of snakes in the gullies and on the damp places round our village. I don't mean harmless grass snakes, we were so used to those we hardly thought of them as snakes at all. Their teeth were small and very sharp, they caught mice and even small birds, and they could probably have bitten through a person's skin, but there was no poison, the bite did no harm.

There were plenty of those grass snakes, especially in the heaps of straw lying near the threshing floor and when the sun was warm they'd come crawling out, they'd hiss if anyone came near and show their tongue or their sting, but snakes





don't bite with their sting. They even lived under the floor in the kitchen sometimes; when a small child was sitting on the floor drinking milk one might glide up and stretch out to the cup, and the child would rap it on the head with a spoon.

But it wasn't only harmless grass snakes we had, there were real bad ones, too—big black ones without the yellow stripe grass snakes have beside their heads. Those poisonous snakes were called adders. They often bit the cattle and if folks didn't manage in time to get old Uncle Okhrim who knew a medicine for snake-bites the poor animal would swell up and die.

One of our boys died from a snake-bite, too. He was bitten close up to the shoulder and before Okhrim could get there the swelling had spread right up to his neck and chest. He got feverish and delirious and two days later he died. I heard a lot about adders when I was a child and was afraid of them, just as if I'd had a feeling I would meet one some day.

They were mowing just behind our kitchen garden in a dry gully; a brook runs there in spring, but in summer it's only damp and the grass grows tall and thick. I used to love the mowing time, especially when they raked the hay into ricks. I'd run across the hayfield and fling myself full tilt onto the rick and roll about in the sweet-smelling hay until the women drove me off so I wouldn't spoil the rick.

This time too I ran and leaped and turned somersaults. There were no women about and the mowers were a long way off; there was only our big black dog Brovko lying on the rick gnawing a bone.

Well, I somersaulted on one rick, turned over two or three times and then jumped up in a fright. Something cold and slippery slid greasily over my arm. My first thought was: a snake! And sure enough, a huge adder which I'd disturbed slid out of the hay and reared up on its tail, ready to attack me.

Instead of running away I stood there, numbstruck, as if the snake had got me fascinated with its lidless, unwinking stare. Another minute and I'd have been lost but Brovko shot across the rick at the snake like an arrow, and a deadly struggle started.

The dog tore at the snake with his teeth and trampled it with his paws; the snake bit the dog's face and chest and belly. Within a few minutes only ragged fragments of snake were left on the ground, but Brovko ran away and disappeared.

It was only then I found my voice and began to scream and cry. The mowers came running and finished off the still moving remnants of snake with their scythes.

The queer thing was that Brovko disappeared, no one knew where he'd got to. It was only after a fortnight he came home—thin and gaunt, but well. My father told me dogs know a kind of plant which can cure them after a snake-bite.





THE FOREST AND THE STREAM

A small stream wandering through the damp dark forest, amidst swamps and moss, complained bitterly that the forest kept it cramped in a small space, it shut off the clear sky and the sunshine and the merry breezes,

"If only men would come and cut down that horrid forest," gurgled the stream.

"My child," said the forest mildly, "you are still young, you don't understand that my shade protects you from being dried by sun and wind; without me to defend you, your weak current would soon dry up. Wait, gather strength beneath my shade, and you will run out to the open plain not as a feeble little stream but as a mighty river. Then you will reflect in your water the brilliant sunshine and the clear sky and play with the strong winds, fearing no harm from them."





BEES ON A SCOUTING SORTIE

Spring had come, the sun dried up the snow on the fields, bright-green spears showed among the old yellowed grass of last year and the buds on the trees opened to let the tender leaves peep out.

A bee awakened, rubbed her eyes with her shaggy feet, then wakened her friends and they looked out of the window to see what was happening—had the snow gone, and the ice, and the cold north wind?

They saw the sun shine brightly, it was fine and warm, so the bees came out of the hive and flew over to the apple tree.

"Have you something for us bees, apple tree? We've got awfully hungry through the winter."

"No," said the apple tree, "you've come too early, my flowers are still hidden in their buds. Ask the cherry tree."

So the bees flew over to the cherry tree.

"Dear cherry tree, have you a flower or two for hungry bees?"

"Come tomorrow, my dears," answered the cherry tree. "Today I haven't got a single flower open, but as soon as I have I'll be glad to welcome you."

The bees flew over to the tulip and peeped into its bright cup but they found neither scent nor honey.



They were just preparing to go home, hungry and sad, when they saw under a bush a tiny purple flower—a violet. It opened its cup full of scent and sweet nectar. So the bees ate and drank their fill and flew home in the best of spirit.





THE STORY OF AN APPLE TREE

I

A crab-apple tree grew in the forest and in the autumn a small sour apple fell to the ground. The birds pecked and pecked the seeds. But one seed was hidden in the ground, and it stayed there.

Winter came and the snow covered it, but in the spring when the sun warmed the wet earth the seed began to grow. It sent down roots, and the first two tiny leaves appeared. Then from between those came a stalk, and buds, and from the buds came real green leaves. Bud after bud, leaf after leaf, twig after twig—and in five years a fine little crab-apple sapling stood where the seed had fallen. Then the gardener came into the forest with his spade.

"That's a promising sapling, I can use that."

The crab-apple tree trembled when the gardener started to dig it up. This is the end of me, he thought.

But the gardener was careful not to damage the roots; he took the sapling away to his orchard and planted it in good soil.





II

The sapling began to feel very proud of himself. I must be a very rare tree, he thought, to be brought from the forest and planted here. And he looked down condescendingly at the ugly stumps round about, all wrapped up in sacking. He did not know that he had come to school.

The next year the gardener came with a curved knife and started cutting away at the sapling. Oh dear, he thought, now I'm lost!

The gardener cut away all the green crown, leaving only a stump and even that he split down the middle. Then in that crack he pushed a shoot from a good apple tree; he sealed up the wound with paste, bandaged it with sacking, put pegs round the new graft and went away.

III

The sapling was very ill after that, but he was young and strong and soon grew together with the new twig; nourished by the juices of the strong sapling, the twig grew fast. It grew bud after bud, leaf after leaf, it threw out twig after twig, and in three years the little tree blossomed in a cloud of fragrant pink and white flowers. Then the delicate petals fell and were replaced by green ovaries, and by autumn they had grown into apples—not

sour little crab-apples but large, rosy, sweet, juicy ones. And the sapling grew into such a fine tree that people would come from other orchards to take its shoots for grafting.



THE FOUR WISHES

Mitya went sledging down the steep hill, he skated on the frozen river and came home with red cheeks, and in high spirits.

"I do love winter!" he cried to his father. "I wish it could be winter all the time!"

"Write down your wish in my notebook," said his father. And Mitya did.

Spring came.

Mitya chased the bright butterflies in the fields, and picked armfuls of flowers. He ran to his father.





"Spring's lovely, I wish it was always spring!"

Again his father took the notebook from his pocket and had Mitya write down the wish.

Summer came and Mitya went haymaking with his father. The boy had a wonderful time, all day long he caught fish, he gathered berries, he somersaulted and rolled around in the fragrant hay.



"What a fine time I've had today!" he cried in the evening. "I wish summer would never end!"

That wish, too, Mitya wrote down in his father's notebook.

Autumn came, the time for gathering the fruit in the orchard—rosy-cheeked apples and golden pears. Mitya was in the seventh heaven.

"Autumn's the best time of all!"

Then his father took out that notebook and showed him that he had said the same about winter and spring and summer.



